THE INESCAPABLE GOD Psalm 139 July 3, 1966
Communion

At first thought it might seem that nothing is more remote from our experience than the suggestion that God is inescapable. In our catalog of things a man must do in his life time, only paying taxes and dying have meaning for every man. After all, the majority of the people in our nation have, in fact not only escaped God, but they seem to have done it with no effort. More people than not simply don't go to church and don't demonstrate any particular religious sensitivity watsoever. A loving God is a completely ~~alive~~ alien thought to them. They have escaped -- or have they?

I have an idea that the write of the 139th Psalm would say they have not escaped. They, and we may be among them, perhaps have succeeded in temporarily shutting out any God-consciousness they may have succeeded is closing the eyes and ears of the spirit they may have succeeded in filling the gap in their lives with something else, but the Psalmist dares to suggest that God remains. He knows them and us, he understands their motives and ours, there is no where they or we can go that will remove us from the sphere of God. That suggestion, when taken seriously, can be profundly comforting but it can, also and perhaps ought to be, profundly disburbing. Before we explore the implications here, however, let's become a little more acquainted with the text itself.

Psalm 139 is, without a doubt one of the greatest passages in the O.T. It has always spoken very deeply to me. Oneof the natural hazards of going to college and studying in Sem. and being a miniter is tendency to lose prsonal integrity along the way. One can get so caughtup in preparing to doa certain job and learing all the profession tricks of the trade that the questins of "Who am I? Do I really want this? Do I really believe this?" are lost in the shuffle. I have discovered the 139th Psalm to be an effective deterent and ego deflator at this

He is one aptly described in the title of a book by J.B. Phillips, God Our Contemporary. This is the God to whom the Psalmist cried: "Wither shall I go from thy spirit? Or wither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven thou art there. If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there! If I take the wimgs of the morning and dwell in the utermost parts of the Sea, even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."

Unlike this man with his exquisite sensitivitie to the presence of God, the contemporary beleiver likes to feel comfortable with a remote deity. The God of American Religiosity is a benign father-figure who sits ona throne out there in the great somewhere. His purpose is limited to getting things started in creation, and welcoming everybody back home after life is over. But in the meantime his remoteness requires only that we tip our hats in his direction with a vague acknowledgment that he exists.

"God is dead" is the rallying cry of the new theologians, and they are correct. For this God never existed - and if he did he wouldn't be worth bothering with. The "God is Dead" theology, even though understood by few, has at least forced many people to be honest at this point. It has forced us all to see clearly that if God is not here, in our midst, if he is not actively involved in the world, his creation, he simply does not exist. And so we have had to open our eyes to the God who is our contemporary. Theological rebels like Bishop Pike and Malcolm Boyd have had the audacity to assume the Biblical role of prophet by pointing to the divine presence in the midst of life.

And yet, this too can be a profoundly disturbing suggestion. For in a very real sense it's more comfortable to beleive in a remote God. When confronted with the possibility that God is present in the neighbor we cannot stand, or that he is active in the freeing of a race of people we'd rather keep at a considerable distance, we rebel. We don't like our God's that close at hand. It's a reaction nobly expressed in Francis Thompson's poem, The Hound of Heaven.

to each other - because the one next to us is evidence of God in our midst. Wec come humbly acknowledging the inescapable God.

As we commune together this morning, let us do so in the spirit of this great Psalm. Let us come to the table - not to give, but to be given something: not to do somethign symbolically - but to have something very immediate be done to us: not to say something about ourselves or our faith, but to hear what the contemporary God, the inescapable God, might be saying to us.

Amen

not to find God - but to be found by God